AIM

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TENANTS TO FIGHT SLUMLORDS, ETC.

Photo by Dan Church

By Willie Counsel, Vice-President HPA

Right now I'm in the process, with some other people, of going around the Hill-Dwight Community checking buildings, mainly the property of Morris Sacks, for violations of the Housing Code. For two or three months I've been talking to tenants about organizing rent strikes and forming tenants' unions.

In the Hill-Dwight area Morris Sacks owns about 23 houses with 85 to 100 families - his holdings are city wide. He concentrates on State Welfare people. The State Welfare Department pays $125 to $160 a month for 5 and 6 room apartments. At 43 White Street there are broken windows, the front door into the house was missing, toilets aren't functioning properly, the heating system is not clean - soot from the furnace is all over the house. Sacks does his own plumbing - his heating and plumbing company office is at 8 South Forest Circle, West Haven.

At 271 Cedar Street last Friday (May 5) I found Sacks had put in a new heating system himself. In the hallway the heating system goes across the window so it blocks it in case of fire and someone has to get out. Inside the apartments there are holes in the walls, no covers on electric outlets - a kid could get electrocuted - pipes have no insulation. What I've been talking to tenants about is what kind of landlord they have. It takes two to three years before he fixes things. They have rats and roaches and all kinds of stuff that he just overlooks. Sacks has a pass key to the apartments. At present there are two suits against him for allegedly entering apartments and surprising tenants at night and early in the morning. The State Welfare Department is supporting this slumlord because they know about the violations.

I have been going through the community and checking when landlords don't pick up garbage. When an apartment has many violations I call up the Division of Neighborhood Improvement and they come and check. DNI then sends out orders to the landlord on his property, giving him a certain amount of time to fix the property. DNI enforces the city Housing Code. The problem I'm running into in the Hill-Dwight area is you find so many houses that have Housing Code violations and they go on for a period of years and the landlord doesn't fix them up. The landlord pays a small fine and the tenant goes on suffering with the problem. I have met with Elliot Segal, the director of DNI - he has good intentions to do something but his hands are tied. The Housing Code is not strong enough to force landlords to make changes. Until the Housing Code is made more forceful, the tenant will suffer the same problems day after day.

Ivan Schaffel - an attorney at 152 Temple Street - is another slum landlord. In one case a woman moved into his property at 23-25 Redfield Street and there were 2 broken windows, the back door was busted in, the bathroom had a big hole in the floor, water was leaking from the top floor down and the ceiling was falling in. I called DNI inspectors and we looked the apartment over. What happened is that Schaffel told the woman he would fix the apartment up when she moved in - she has 8 kids. He never

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tenants fight cont.

did. After DNI went over the building it took 2½ months to get the windows fixed. Meantime the kids got colds and had to go to the hospital. DNI summoned Schaffel to their office and gave him orders to fix the apartment up.

In the Hill-Dwight area a lot of kids have become victims of lead poisoning from eating paint. Old dwellings are a real problem because the walls have many layers of lead-base paint. In a couple of cases kids have died. My sister's daughter, a baby, has lead poisoning. Three other kids in the same building - 23-25 Sylvan Avenue - also have it. If the lead count in the body gets too high, it damages the brain. Lead poisoning can paralyze or cause mental disturbance. DNI hasn't taken issue on this. DNI must take a strong position and force landlords not to use lead-base paint. It should take direct action - start making landlords fix up the entire building where lead poisoning has occurred. That might require new walls.

I hope in at least another month to have all the tenants organized. We'll have a giant meeting to form a tenants' union to really deal with slum landlords. The tenants can set their own rents - what they think is fair.

Another problem is with the State Highway Department. They have purchased buildings for Route 34 and are solely responsible as landlord. At the last count - early May - they own 8 buildings on Dwight Street, 9 on Day Street, 19 on Legion Avenue, 8 on Orchard, 4 on Scranton Street, 6 on Winthrop. 2 on Tyler, 4 on Sherman, 2 on Waverly and 1 on each of Greenwood, Fayette and Auburn Streets for a total of 65 buildings. People, still living in these buildings, pay rent to the Highway Department. As landlord, the Highway Department is not picking up garbage. For example - at 115-117 Legion Avenue no garbage was picked up between

Photo by Dan Church

some of the art work done by people in the Hill to enhance their newly remodeled office of the Hill Parents Assn.

February and late March. I called DNI which contacted the State Highway Department and they started collecting garbage. At 125 Legion Avenue the ceiling is falling, hot water flows into the bathtub so slowly that it gets cold before there's enough for a bath, and there is a broken window. Anyone who has walked around the area at Legion Avenue and Day Street can see that there are hundreds of Housing Code violations. The State Highway Department is a slum landlord. The City Sanitation Department isn't doing the job it should either.

My whole thing is that New Haven has a shortage of houses for low income and welfare families. It is time to start building. Houses on the Hill are unfit for human beings to live in. There is no place for people - Negroes that is - to go except within certain areas. Landlords know there is a shortage of houses and they can charge the limit. It is a fact - I know from experience - that the area for Negroes is limited. They can call up say a Sherman Avenue landlord for a 4 to 5 room apartment, and they are told the apartment is no longer available. Three to four months later they can go by there and it's still empty. I know people in the Hill area who have been looking 2 to 5 years and can't find a decent apartment. Landlords say they don't want more than 1 or 2 children. But it's a race issue. It's not because apartments aren't available. The time has come for Negroes to start having a say about this.

HPA SCHOOL

The Hill Parents Association is setting up a summer school program for both children and parents, people of all ages. There will be skills classes - English for Spanish speaking people, mathematics, writing and public speaking; art classes - dancing, acting, painting, poetry; and idea classes - history, literature. The curriculum will take definite form and will expand as people volunteer to teach. Anyone who has ideas for a course and is willing to devote time this summer to an exciting kind of free education should call the HPA.

The HPA has been remodeling its office at 662 Congress Avenue. An open house was held for the neighborhood to reopen the office on Friday, May 19 at 3 in the afternoon.

nina, david cont.

For those who don't know the Adamses, the story of their work in New Haven is the story of the growth of the local peace movement from a small group of Yale students to one of the few viable independent political organizations in the country. Hopefully it's only the end of chapter one for the Adamses. We look forward to their return from Milan a year from now for the start of chapter two. Meanwhile, we'll enjoy the "footnotes" they've promised to contribute to the newsletter, commenting on the Italian political situation.

The leaving of the Adamses points up the problem of the "wandering intellectuals" that plagues the movement all over the country. No sooner do academics get involved in a local organization than they are forced by the pressures of their careers to move. AIM is trying to find an alternative to this pattern, and the Adamses have not only forced the issue but also added their own insights. Their tentative plan to return to New Haven in a year is very encouraging to those of us who will be staying.

LOOP HIGHWAY QUESTIONED

Dan Crofts went to Hartford in the middle of April to testify against the Loop road funding bill. He had previously worked with the Legion Avenue women who met with Mayor Lee on relocation problems caused by another road project, Route 34 (February 16 issue). Lee and Yale President Kingman Brewster were in Hartford testifying for the bill.

Crofts' impression is that the State Highway Commission is not in love with the proposed construction.

The Commission realizes that the Loop would cost $15 million a mile, making it one of the most expensive highways in the world. (The Connecticut Turnpike cost $3 million a mile.) The state is also not enthusiastic about this Lee-Brewster scheme because there is no chance to get Federal financing for it, since the Loop is not part of the interstate highway system.

The hearing ended with only the possibility of a study of the need for a Loop road being funded.

Crofts thinks that the construction of the Loop can be stopped. He is considering forming a public committee to work against the road.

Stopping Route 34 is a dead issue to Crofts. The controversy and concern generated by the relocation of the people in its path, however, has been useful. For example, Alderman William Rees of the 21st ward recently exposed the assurances of the Lee administration that there was plenty of decent housing available to the people being displaced by bulldozers. In a letter to the State Highway Commission, Rees asked that land acquisition for Route 34 be slowed down. He said that tenants in the area are being given two-week eviction notices, and there isn't any place for them to move to. Rees told the Highway Commission that delay is necessary because New Haven's public housing is deteriorated, the rent certificate program is too small, and the city is too slow in building new housing. He later said that 1,000 low income units should be built on the Hill, instead of the 40 planned. (800 people will be replaced by Route 34 and 1,400 more families are on the waiting list for city housing, according to Rees. A private developer could be employed to get the housing up faster than the city will, Rees suggested. New Haven Development Administrator Melvin Adams thought he was answering Rees and maintaining Lee's picture of places for all when he said that he "believed" that "pre-

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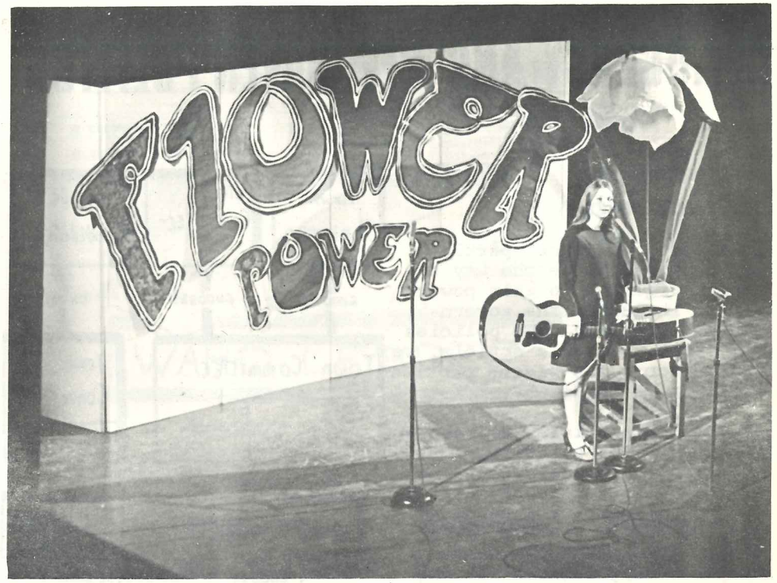


Flowers were power at the Paxton-Collins-Mitchell Trio Concert. The powerful and delightful daffodil on stage was made by Karin Cook and crew, while Peggy Millard collected scores of real daffodils which were given out to people in the audience. Shown above is Judy Collins. Photo by Dan Church

CONCERT REDUCES DEBT

The April 26 benefit concert cut the AIM debt by approximately $2050, according to Judith Eaton and Bob Gelbach of the Community Concert Committee, sponsors of the event. $1750 remains to be paid off.

The Committee was pleased that although Woolsey Hall was not filled - 1100 of the 2700 tickets available were sold - the concert was very successful and the profit was high. Expenses came to only $650.

Joe Frazier was the sole member of the Chad Mitchell Trio to appear since the trio split up only days before the concert. However, Frazier brought with him a fine new folk talent, Bruce Murdock. The two introduced some new songs composed by Murdock as well as a contemporary version of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Judy Collins performed for the first 40 minutes of the show and Tom Paxton for the last approximately 45 minutes. Both Judy and Paxton gave an excellent performance of both new and familiar songs and considered the concert enjoyable and successful

To help raise more money, a second AIM picnic is tentatively planned for June. The Committee is considering another concert in the fall and welcomes suggestions. Call Judith Eaton, 865-1481, or Bob Gelbach, 624-2977.

DEMOCRACY AND NEW HAVEN POLITICS

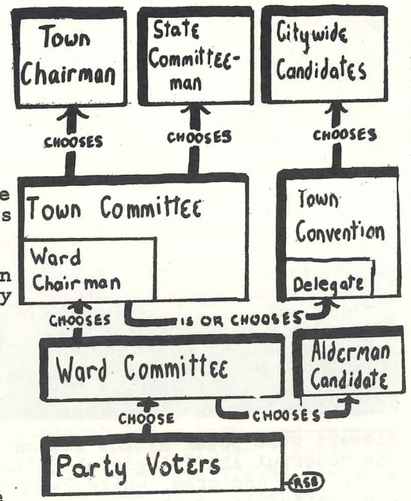
II: PARTY POWER

In theory, political parties are supposed to be the way the people organize to gain power and to influence the government to carry out the policies they want. In this article, we will discuss the waythe parties really work in New Haven.

In the last article, we gave an outline of the politics of city government, and said that one of the political forces acting on and in the city government was the party. In New Haven today, this means the Democratic party, because all the Aldermen and major city officials are Democrats.

The parties are supposed to be organized from the bottom up. So in each of New Haven's 33 wards, there is a Ward Committee. The Ward Committee is elected by the Registered Democratic voters in the ward, and elects its own Chairman. The Ward Committee's job is to take care of party affairs in the Ward, get out the vote on election day, and nominate the candidate for Alderman in that Ward. The Ward Chairman and the Ward Chairwoman are delegates to the Town Committee, which runs party affairs in all New Haven, and its members or their designates nominate candidates for city offices.

This same system works all the way up to the National level. The Town Committee elects a chairman and chairwoman who in turn choose delegates to the State Committee, and the State Committee elects a chairman and chairwoman who are delegates to the National Committee. So each party leader is directly responsible to the people at only one point: in the ward. Above that, he is responsible only to other party members, who elected him. If he should be defeated by them, he is still politically alive as long as he has his power base in his ward.



FORMAL PARTY STRUCTURE —IN NEW HAVEN—

CONTROL BY LEADERS

So the whole party organization is based on the ward organizations and on the registered party voters in each ward. But the main aim of each politician is to keep control of his organization and to maintain his power. They want few rivals and a secure position for themselves. There are several ways in which they maintain their power.

First, Committee members hold office indefinitely unless challenged in a primary. Also, if some one resigns from the Committee, the Ward Chairman may appoint a new member without an election unless his choice is challenged. So, by avoiding primaries and appointing men loyal to himself, a Ward Chairman can keep pretty good control of his Ward Committee.

Second, the size of the Ward Committee depends on the number of registered party members in the Ward. So, when you register to vote, you are not given an opportunity to register with a party unless you ask for it. In this way the number of registered party voters may be kept low, and the result is a small, controllable Ward Committee.

Third, a political leader at the Ward level maintains his power by being able to give out jobs and do favors for his supporters. He must do this in order to keep their support. These favors include things like pollwatching jobs on election day, small city contracts, such as plowing streets and hauling, making contacts with city agencies for permits and other desired city benefits, and so forth.

THE CITY LEADERS

But to be able to do this, the Ward leader needs the cooperation of the party officers and public officials at higher levels. These higher leaders control city patronage and contracts, and have larger bases of support and more financial sources. They use these powers to help supporters and thus build up their own followings. But they have not only power that comes from support, but power that comes from law, and from being in a position of authority.

From these men, the Ward leaders can get the financial and political support they need. They can be assured of a hearing for their requests in City Hall and at party headquarters. They can be assured that all patronage, jobs, and contracts concerning their ward will be cleared with them - that is, that they will have a voice in who gets these benefits. The city leaders will also give loyal supporters a chance to move up to higher office or party position.

In return, the ward leaders must support the leaders at the higher level. They will swing their support behind the party candidates, get their men to work for the party, contribute to it, and get out the vote. They will support the leaders' policies. They provide the city leaders with their bases of support. Finally, when the question comes of who they will nominate for Alderman in their Ward, or who to appoint to a vacant place on the Ward Committee, they will consult with the city leaders.

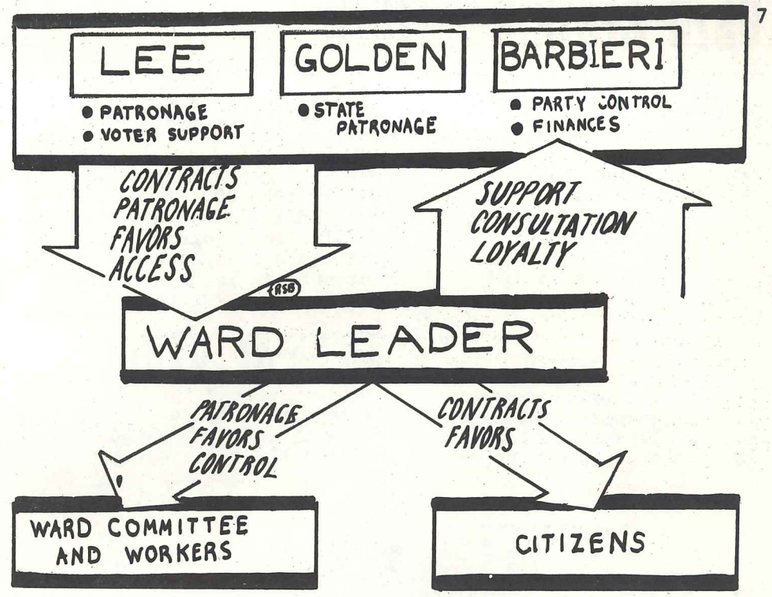
In New Haven, the Democratic party power at the highest level is shared by three men: Mayor Richard Lee, State Committeeman John Golden, and Town Chairman Arthur Barbieri. Mayor Lee has particular control over city jobs and support in the electorate; Committeeman Golden has large influence on nominations and patronage on the State level, as well as access to sources of party financial support; Chairman Barbieri controls much party patronage and party structure, and also distribution of party finances. These three men, who are generally said to run the New Haven Democratic party are all rivals for party power, but are also balanced so that none can eliminate any other, and they all cooperate so far as it is necessary for the good of the party.

None of these men has the resources to keep up his own power position by himself. Each has more favors to do than he has things he can give. Therefore, each tries to increase his resources by taking some away from the others, or pays his debts to his supporters by building up his debts with the other leaders. These IOUs are the key to the running of the political system; they are borrowed power, paid back with power.

POWER RELATIONSHIPS

Political leaders begin, in general, by building a base of support either in a ward or by doing party work for established leaders. When they do work, they are then owed favors by the leaders, who give them higher positions and chances for office as well as listening to their requests. Thus they build a larger base of power, which eventually can be a city-wide network of influence.

The lesser leaders need the city leaders, but their support is also needed by the "big three." They try to keep the Ward leaders in line, but if they will not go along, it is cheaper to compromise than to try to eliminate them in a primary fight. Sometimes, however, there is a fight, and the city leaders are able to put their own loyal supporters into the Ward leadership. Or, they fail, and the dissenting Ward leader keeps his power base and can continue to oppose the city leaders.



Party Power Structure in New Haven

POWER AND PEOPLE

From this outline it can be seen that though the original idea of a party was to make the people's wishes effective in government, the party is in fact based on the people and their wishes only at the lowest level. At all levels above the Ward, the politicians are not responsible to the people, but only to the other active politicians who keep them in their position. Their only direct supporters among the people are those in their ward base of support.

At these higher levels, the party is a holding company for power. The structure of the party is maintained by the net-work of mutual favors and IOUs between the political leaders.

There is the power of the people in New Haven, when the people organize to demand something, or express their wishes in discussion and voting. But usually, this does not happen. People do not organize, so there is no concentration of voting power and the politicians do not listen to them. The power system is, therefore, not closed, but it takes a great deal of effort to enter.

There is nothing wrong with having a system for organizing power; in fact, power must be organized, or it cannot work at all. But the structure should allow people to organize and gain power, and use the power to achieve the kind of government they want. Instead, the system is concerned with power, more than with what to use it for.

This is the second of three articles on New Haven politics based on interviews of Dave Murray by Rich Beth.

Dave's knowledge of New Haven politics comes from many years experience as a citizen participating in the city's political life. Rich is a graduate student of Political Science at Yale University.

USED CLOTHING NEEDED

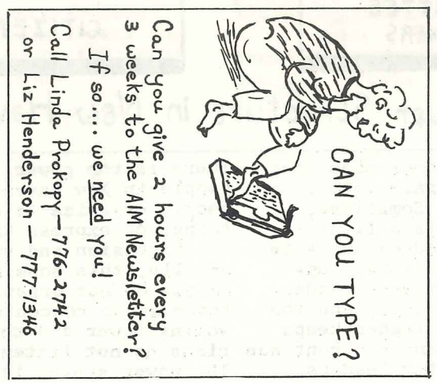
A clothing drive is being conducted for the Mississippi Delta area. All kinds of clothing are needed. Collection centers are the Hill Parents Association office, 662 Congress Avenue and the Hill CPI office, 649 Howard Avenue.

NOTE: THINGS ARE GETTING TOUGHER: Certain areas in southern states are choosing to replace free distribution of surplus food to poor people who are literally starving with a federal Food Stamp program. The stamps cost $2.00 per person, or $12 for families of six or more, per month, while 60-90% of the Negroes in the Mississippi Delta are unemployed. Congressional committees have refused to drop the price of food stamps to 50¢ per person, and now want instead to raise it to 20% of the cost of food items bought. There is surplus food going to waste and there are people starving, but nothing is done to match up the two conditions.

highway cont.

liminary plans" for 200 units of housing for the elderly on the Hill would be ready by mid-May and "designs" for 200 cooperative middle-income apartments might be ready. The family that has to move in two weeks isn't going to get much comfort out of drawings of homes they don't qualify for or can't afford. They need low-income housing now. And the central fact in the "new New Haven" redevelopment is that the city has not built any low-income housing since 1954. Adams was a little more candid about the true housing situation when he added that people facing eviction could probably get deadline extensions, because Route 34 construction would not begin until 1969. He was admitting there might be some need to wait until they could really be provided for.

-- N.K., E.K.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